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PRAYER.

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."—1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

I have selected this passage because in its phraseology it gives some idea of the breadth of the exercise of prayer which really belongs to it, and tends to lift it up out of that narrow, and I might say personal and selfish, circuit in which it so often moves, and where it is so often contemplated by those who are arguing against prayer from grounds of material truth. For men have been too much accustomed to regard prayer as a mere profitable transaction; as a running to God, as men run to the store, or to the doctor, or to the lawyer (never except when they lack something, and wish to procure it) making prayer a sort of serviceable errand business. They do not ask, therefore, that the ten thousand wants of daily life shall be supplied by vigilance, and industry, nor through the methods of suffering and enjoying by which men are built up and educated, but beg them of God off-hand, as if it were his business to supersede his own law, and set aside his own method of educating the race, and to give a premium to self-indulgence and indolence, instead of adhering to his system of providing for the needs of men by the employment of a certain economy.

Prayer is, in its fullest conception, the noblest parts of the soul in the noblest attitude of communion or converse with God. It has in it an element of supplication; it has in it an element of intercession; it has in it a hundred elements, because the generic conception of it is the bringing of the

soul in its higher faculties into immediate communion with God, and giving it perfect liberty. Of course, under such circumstances, in differing strains and in different emergencies, prayer will vary.

Prayer is not, therefore, the voice of a beggar. It is not simply the expression of want. It is the expression, in our best hours, and in our best moods, of the best thoughts, the best sentiments, the best emotions, the best aspirations, the best of everything. If the soul be a mighty estate; if it hath everything of flower and of fruit in it, we bring something of everything, and the best, and offer it to God. Prayer is not, then, simply a desire that we may have that which in the present hour we may need. It is a sense of our alliance with our heavenly Father. It is an endeavor to be in such converse with Him as a child is during the hour of its joy, or of its sorrow, or of its burden, in the presence of its earthly parent. It is lifting up the soul out of matter, and out of its poor surroundings, into the presence and sympathy of the Spirit of God, the great Love and Lover.

From the material side, prayer may be criticised philosophically, and has been, and is to-day; but if you look upon it from the material side alone, and criticize it, you only criticize its abuse; you only criticize what may be a disease, and not the thing itself—not its full self—not its ideal self. That is psychologic. In its last analysis, prayer is a state of the soul in the presence of God. It is the radiancy, the communicativeness, the aspiration, the spontaneous utterance, of thought or feeling or words, or all that which is in us in those moments when, separating ourselves from every other thing, we stand consciously in the presence of our heavenly Father.

Let us look, then, at prayer as it is presented in the New Testament, and see if it has not something of this largeness—if it is not essentially a condition of the soul in its best moments, open and disclosed before God. Look, for one single moment, at the construction of our Lord's prayer, which he gives, not as a form, but as a universal type, of prayer.

"After this manner, therefore, pray ye:"

Pray, not in these words, necessarily, but according to the

genius of this prayer. And what is it? Every word is a separate jewel.

“Our Father which art in heaven—”

The One above limitation, above imperfection, above the touch of sin and frailty; the Sovereign; the Lord God Almighty; He who is interpreted by the word “Father,” and who is “ours” to every man who utters it; the Being that is Father in the most exalted of all possible ways.

“Hallowed be thy name.”

The soul’s highest and most disinterested aspiration, the glorying of a child’s love for the honor of a father, is here indicated.

“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.”

In uttering these simple sentences, the soul finds itself walking in the procession of ages among invisible spirits, and in that vast stream of tendencies which from eternity to eternity is rearing up the kingdom of God, and perfecting it.

After this communion with God, this utterance of all that is most disinterested and spiritual, then comes,

“Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

All of these petitions are of such a tone that they become specific of the generic phrases with which the prayer opens. For the honor of God, and for the advancement of his cause, specific things are asked—support, forgiveness, defense.

So, then, if you look into the Lord’s Prayer, you shall find that it implies the noblest of all mental conditions and experiences. It is not a whine; it is not a long confession; it is not wrestling: it is the effluence of a blossoming soul on which has fallen the sense of God’s love.

If you look again at the prayer of our Lord which I read in your hearing as a part of the opening service, which he uttered near the close of his ministry, and in which he besought God for his disciples, and for all who had caught the sacred contagion of love, or should do it, through the ages, you will see how lofty that strain is. You will see how far it is removed from personal and selfish supplication in his own

behalf. Yea, and when, in that mysterious trial of the Garden, he was borne down with woes undescribed and indescribable, in that hour in which, pressed to the uttermost, he had recognition of his own suffering, he besought God that the cup might pass from him, he sprang up from that personal petition, instantly, saying, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done"; thus joining, in a petition of the extremest anguish, his own welfare to the honor and glory of God's name.

Consider the subject of prayer as it is laid out for us in the history of the apostle Paul. In him it was the enthusiasm of fidelity, of admiration, of love, out of which he prayed, and from which, as from a central motive, he commands prayer upon all the disciples. He says :

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving."

All his experience of day and night, everything that he had suffered, wrought out in him a sense of divine beneficence ; and whenever, during his life, he came into the presence of God, he had some reason for thanksgiving.

"In everything, by prayer and supplication and thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God."

Go to God, not with an empty scrip, asking your daily crust : go to him in the full recognition of his bounty and love and goodness, and pour your prayer through the heart's warmth of admiration, and adoration, and thanksgiving.

In another place he says :

"Rejoicing in hope ; patient in tribulation ; continuing instant in prayer."

In still another place he says :

"Without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers."

Speaking in the language of personal friendship, and so revealing his daily life—how he bore up his beloved ones incessantly in his thoughts, and communed with them in the presence of God, at the feet of the One who was pierced—he says again :

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, making request with joy."

Consider the whole state of mind implied by such language as that.

In writing to Timothy, he says :

"I thank God that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day."

Take one other passage, which is recorded in Ephesians :

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man."

He has risen up to the very highest atmosphere of inwardness and spirituality.

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to *know* the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

Now, I aver that in the most disinterested and the most resplendent friendships of the noblest natures there is room for an interchange of offices—for giving and taking; I declare that it is consistent with the very magnanimity of a true friendship to ask help, to ask sympathy, to ask succor; but what would be thought of a friendship that had gone down so low that the only suggestion which a person had of this relation was that it gave one the opportunity of getting indorsements in time of trouble, of getting nursing in time of sickness, or of getting a good word spoken from influential quarters in time of need? What if the mere begging or gift side was the only thing that came to our thought in contemplating friendship? What is there in the intercourse of true friendship that is so enriching as the casting of one's self on another? What gifts can any man offer to you that are comparable with those which he gives in trust, and love, and praise, and incitement? That which brings out my soul for you, brings a better gift than my hand can render, even in the most desperate emergencies; for there is nothing that can be compared to it in all the coin exchanges that are known among men. There is no treasure like that which the soul has.

How sweet are gifts which come from love, whether they be of intrinsic value, or only associational! When two persons have walked together, and interchanged the highest and purest and noblest things, if one plucks from the hawthorn

or some other near bush a blossom for a memorial, how sacred is it, as though it had grown by the throne of God itself ! That flower is of little intrinsic value ; yet how is it perfumed and stained through with the odor and color of heaven ! And the memories of it—how sacred are they ! Or if, instead of that, one should take from the neck a simple locket, and give it as a souvenir—as a token of mutual pledges and aspirations and hopes—how precious would such a gift be beyond any other that the most exquisite skill, dealing with the rarest values, could construct ! For it is the soul that gives value to these things.

But what if love were to become so degenerate that the moment the friend left the house another should rush in and ask, “ Did he give you anything ? ” and the answer being, “ No,” should say, “ Humph ! what is the use of his visiting here if he does not give you anything ? ”

Our souls rise into the very personal presence of God, and have the consciousness of God’s life breathing through them ; the nobler passages of our being are opened ; the sense of eternal blessedness dawns on us ; the favor of God, and the love of God, and the bounty of God, as expressed through Jesus Christ, come home to our realization ; and there are men so degenerate in their conceptions of prayer that when we return to our consciousness after such high communings, they say, “ What is the use of praying ? Do you suppose that you will get loaves of bread by praying for them ? Do you suppose that harvests will be given to you in answer to prayer ? Do you suppose prayer will protect you against storms, and relieve you from diseases ? ”

Is the hope of getting something the only thing for which men come into each other’s presence ? Is there nothing higher than gifts ? Is there not something more royal than abundance ? If the soul may lift itself up into the presence of God, so that it feels, “ I am a king, I am a priest, I am God’s own child, and I am an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ to an eternal inheritance,” is there no remuneration, no royalty, in that presence of God ? I say that a true friendship must include the interchange of interest, of confidence, and of love. There is, indeed, also the advantage of a

friend's kind offices ; but that is lower down. It is the last and the least thing to be considered in connection with friendship. And often that is beneficial to us more on account of the testimony which it bears of the kind feeling of him who gives, than on account of the intrinsic value of the gift.

It is right in me to say, "Give me my daily bread," leaving it to God to give it in any way that it pleases him—to minister it through one agency or another. This point is never expounded. There is no word of philosophical explanation given in regard to the manner in which prayers shall be answered. The petition is, simply, "Give us our bread ; forgive us our sin ; lead us away from tempting ; deliver us from evil." The language is given without comment. It does not imply whether the things asked are to be wrought out by our being stimulated to work for them, whether we are to be inspired to take care of ourselves, or not. Paul and other eminent saints have been accustomed to plead with God for favors, doubtless ; but it is in the higher atmosphere of the soul that those elements of prayer become lawful which imply intimacy with God.

Therefore I hear the two extremes of this subject of prayer expounded. I hear men arguing, seriously and long, to show that God is a prayer-hearing God, and will answer prayer ; and to prove it they cite instances which have come under their notice. Mr. So-and-so was on the point of starvation, and he prayed for food, and a sheep came to his door, and he ate it ; and so his prayer was answered. Another man wanted wood, and he could not get any, and he prayed, and at night somebody came and left a load in his yard ; and so his prayer was answered. Another man had a note to pay, and he could not get the money, and he prayed, and somebody came and brought him the money ; and his prayer was answered, also.

I do not doubt that there are answers of prayer on that lower plane ; but this I say : it is an absolute vulgarization of the whole grand theme of prayer to represent it from that side. It is so low that it is a stench in the nostrils of any man who has a sense of what is the altitude and glory of

prayer. I would not permit a man to call me his friend who had no other friendship for me but to bring me fodder and supply me with something for my body. The friend himself is the best answer to our wants. I do not disdain these lower offices, among others ; but when prayer is argued as being true on this low ground, chiefly and continually, until men come to think that praying is like dropping orders into the Post Office, or sending around boys to the store, it is degraded far below its real character. True praying, beginning here, ends in the kingdom of God ; and whatever comes short of that is such fantastic vapor, such effluvia, as to be unworthy of the name. And anybody who represents prayer as consisting in these lower and perishing elements demeans it, dishonors God, degrades the soul, and under-estimates that altitude which belongs to us in our better moods before our heavenly Father. Prayer, chiefly, is the soul's communion with God. It is chiefly translation. It is chiefly transfiguration. It was worth more to Peter, James and John, to stand for an hour and see the spirits dawn through the heaven, and talk with Christ, whose face shone as the sun, and whose raiment was white as the light, than if the three tabernacles which they craved had been built of diamonds and rubies on the mountain-top. It is what we get by the *soul* that makes us rich.

In regard to these lesser wants, it is not always best that they should be supplied. It is a great deal better for a man who wants to be relieved from pain to find that he can bear it than to have it taken away from him. It is a great deal better for one who wants to be relieved from sorrows to find that he can walk through sorrows unharmed, than to have them removed from him. It is a great deal better for one who suffers lack and wants abundance to have some invisible inspiration come into his soul by which he can say, "I have all things even when I have nothing, if God be mine," than to receive that abundance. When we have the inspiration of reason, and of faith, and of hope, and of conscience, and of love ; when the influence of the higher sphere rests down upon us ; when we are walking with God, and abiding with him, then we have everything that we want, and we do not

feel the lack of these lower blessings. We are brought into such a state that we no longer crave them, or think about them.

Our wants, it seems to me, are very much like a dandelion blossom—or rather that which follows the blossom. A man goes to God to ask for something the need of which is oppressing him ; and when he has come consciously into the divine presence, he has forgotten what brought him there, and he pours out his soul in love, and thanksgiving, and hope, and rapture, and goes away, and by and by remembers the circumstance, and says, “Why, I did not ask God for what I meant to ; I meant to ask him for such and such things, and I forgot all about them.” The winds of the higher heaven blow away a thousand of men’s petitions. There is no more occasion for them. When the presence of God makes the soul consciously rich, it no longer wants outward mercies. We live low down ; and more than half of all the wants which we feel, more than half of all the things which we dread, are the result of low living ; so that anything which exalts us, delivers us from many peculiar necessities, and therefore from the need of prayer concerning them.

You will find abundant confirmation of these thoughts in following out their lines in the New Testament. Take, for instance, the experience of the apostle Paul. He was fairly bedewed with prayer, if one might so say. Day by day prayers were to him what dewdrops are on summer mornings to fragrant bushes, all of whose leaves are wet. He was fragrant with prayer. It was the end of his living. He exhaled before God perpetually. His soul rose up out of care. He derived strength from weakness, and wealth from poverty. No man ever extracted more than he from a life which was such a martyrdom as his was. He declared that he died deaths daily ; and yet I affirm that human nature has nowhere else given utterance to such exquisite phraseology, representing the soul’s calmness, and triumph, and blessedness, and richness received from God, as that which came from the lips of that apostle. As birds that are low down in dusky forests, and are chased by owls, escape in the broad sunlight ; so our souls, when they are in low, dark places, flying away from these up toward God, find release, and sing for joy.

Paul prayed for himself. I do not know what he did not pray for. He prayed for his friends; he prayed for churches; he prayed for communities that he wanted to see, but never had seen; he prayed for his associates; he prayed for magistrates; he prayed for rulers; he prayed for those that loved him, and for those that hated him; he prayed for God's cause and kingdom everywhere; he prayed day and night; he prayed in season and out of season. Prayer was the continuous action of his soul.

Praying, then, is not so much an office as it is the soul's whole attitude toward God, so that everything which one does he does in conscious communion with God.

If these views be correct, they will throw a great deal of light on the difficulties which lie in the way of men.

First, consider speculative difficulties. There are many persons who study prayer altogether from the side of natural law, having taken the lower view of it; and they exercise themselves in questionings and arguments as to whether prayer can be answered or not. I say that prayer is the highest psychological experience; that therefore it runs outside of the range of material science; and that no man who is only competent to judge by the senses, and of the qualities of matter or material things, is in a position to judge of the nature of prayer, or of its reality, its scope, or its indirect consequences. This is a chain of argument that has not been enough brought out.

A man asks in prayer that he may write a *Novum Organum*; and his friends say to him, "Oh, fool! Do you think that God is going to answer that prayer? Do you think that he is going to so operate on your mind that you, who never could write, who have no talent for writing, shall be able to write a book like that? Do you think you are going to have a *Novum Organum* written, and printed, and given to you because you ask it?"

But suppose a man, in offering such a prayer, comes into the presence of God, and attains a state of most ecstatic exaltation, so that every power of his nature is brought under the direct influence of the divine mind; and suppose that in this exalted state, which comes from love and communion

and gratitude, his mind, enlivened and stimulated, begins to act, and performs some noble literary feat, accomplishes some wonderful oratorical achievement, or produces some sweet hymn or poem that charms the ages, does he not receive an answer to his prayer? Is not that an answer to prayer which, by inspiration, so empowers every part of a man's soul that he becomes reduplicated in his forces, more unerring in his judgment, and more competent to think and do a thousand things which he could not otherwise think and do? Do you not know the difference between an army led by a man who has no courage and who inspires no confidence, and that same army led by a general whose very name makes every soldier's heart bound with zeal and enthusiasm? Do you not know that many and many a battle is lost because men are not themselves, or because that which is in them is not aroused and brought out; and that many and many a battle is gained because men's souls are fired, and they are made to feel that they are doubly men? Have you never noticed how strong the child becomes in the performance of duty under the smiles of the parent? Did you never see how much better a boy fought when his companions clapped him on and encouraged him? Are you not aware how all the influences of society multiply the power of men and their successes? And shall the soul, that lifts itself into the very presence of Power, that is able to conceive of God, and that takes on the divine atmosphere and stimulus—shall it not, in its higher and normal action, be more and do more than it otherwise could be or do? And is not the answer to prayer the result which is wrought out in those elevated conditions to which prayer leads?

I pray to God, saying, "Give me roses;" and up come clouds. I pray for roses, and God sends rain. Very well; do not clouds and rain bring roses? They may bring them in circuitous ways that I do not expect them to come in, but they bring them nevertheless. The *Opifex maximus*, the Architect of the universe, works out our wants, not according to our ideas, but along the line of his own supreme knowledge. I think the answer to prayer is that which gives

inspiration to the souls of men ; and he who walks in the presence of God, and lives under the inspiration of his down-brooding touch, has in himself the great causes which will work out the answers of prayer—and that in the higher spheres, as well as in the lower. Are not sentiments realities as well as physical objects ? Is love, the ultimate of human life, nothing ? Are not peace, joy, and faith anything ? Is the dirt that Wallace trod on a real, scientific, substantial reality, and shall the indomitable hope and courage that were in his soul go for nothing ? Is all that exists outside of mere material facts of no account ? Is there nothing but what the sensuous faculties can feel or see ? Is there no God ? Is there no invisibility ? Is there nothing but body, matter, mud, very dust ? I should think we had come from the dust, and that we had not got a great way from it yet !

Another reason why prayer is not more in vogue and more in the faith of men, is the low and selfish forms of it which are so prevalent. For, what are your prayers ? What is your daily habit of prayer ? Is it the higher realms in which you are living in your thoughts ? You need not say what they are ; I know what they are ; but take the daily round of men's prayers, and what is it, but an extremely low, secular, materializing series of petitions ?

Where men begin their prayers by piling up old, long, familiar, worn, empty titles ; where they commence their prayers by saying, “ O thou omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, all-seeing, ever-living, blessed Potentate, Lord God Jehovah ! ” I should think they would take breath. “ Why,” it is asked, “ are not such titles as these right ? ” Yes ; but what should be the state of a man's mind when he can fill up such big words as these with the reality of their meaning ? That there are extreme moods, that there are great and critical times, when God has, by the breaths of heaven and the currents of earth, moved men in these higher elements ; that there are periods when these words are as majestic as God himself in the souls of men, there is no doubt ; but think of a man in his family, hurried for his breakfast or to get away to his business, praying in such a strain ! He has a note

coming due, and it is going to be paid to-day; and he feels buoyant; and he goes down on his knees like a cricket on the hearth, and piles up these majestically moving phrases about God. Then he goes on to say with hasty formality that he is a sinner. Yes, he is *proud* to say that he is a sinner. He goes with the multitude in this respect. Then he asks that he may be forgiven, and that his heart may be changed. And then he asks for his daily bread. He has it; and he can always ask for it when he has it. After running on thus briefly, in the old stereotyped way, he winds up with, "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and forever. Amen." Then he jumps up, and goes over to the city, and attends to his business affairs. At night he comes back, and if he is not disturbed by sleepiness, by company, or by something else, he has "evening prayers;" but he never dreams of approaching his Father in heaven in any other than this hard, formal, matter-of-fact way. And he is called a "praying man!" A *praying man*? I should sooner call myself an ornithologist because I ate a chicken once in a while for my dinner. In outside affairs, does occasionally having something to do with them constitute an acquaintance with them? Does any man really pray who does not know the inner man that belongs to his nature? Does any man pray in reality who has not a consciousness of God present with him? He that goes to God "must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." How large is the interpretation of that saying! He that goes to God, goes to One whom the heavens cannot contain, nor the earth, which is his footstool. How lordly is the soul that mounts up into some sort of conception of the amplitude, the grandeur, the glory and the desirableness of the Father in heaven!

Now, I do not wonder that, when men pray, as they often do, regulation prayers, they have a great deal of doubt whether prayer is anything more than a kind of punctuation in life, separating the different parts by commas, and colons, and periods, and other stops, so that they shall not huddle themselves too closely together. Often it is a very vulgar and low life that they lead, and their living takes away not only their

own but other men's faith in prayer. Yet I never found any man who prayed through sorrows, through great distresses, through darkness; I never found a man who prayed with a spirit that had life and power in it, and who was by prayer lifted into his higher and nobler self—I never found such a man who could bear to listen, for a moment, to any argument against prayer. If prayer has been to you like sparkling wine; if it has filled your soul with ecstatic joy, not once nor twice, but a hundred times; and if you bear witness, “The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me,” who can establish a battering-ram against your experience? Who can take away the confidence which it breathes?

Then, another reason why people doubt prayer is because, to a large extent, it is occasional. Men pray when they are pushed to it. Prayer is not life to them; but, to be efficacious to you, prayer, preëminently, must be your very life.

Who could write poetry that had never practised writing? If a man who for twenty-five or thirty years had not taken up a pen, thinking it convenient to write a poem, should sit down and try to write one, would he succeed? Suppose a man who had never addressed an audience, or framed a sentence, should undertake to deliver an oration, would he succeed? Could a man be a writer or an orator under such circumstances? A man cannot write until he has learned and practiced writing; and a man cannot speak until he has learned and practiced speaking. The mechanic, if he is to succeed, must have experience in his business, and so must the merchant. We know that education and training are essential to the attainment of the lower objects of life; and shall those which are unspeakably higher, and which call into play the nobler faculties and laws of our being, be had just for the trying? You can draw a stop of an organ, and it will give the sound which belongs to that stop; but you cannot do the same thing with the soul. If you would enjoy the richest fruits of prayer, you must abound in prayer; you must live in the conscious presence of God; you must be in constant and intimate communion with him. Then, there can be no doubt, no skepticism, in your mind as to the effi-

cacy of prayer. It is the infrequency of prayer, as well as the economic view which is taken of it, that breeds doubt in the minds of so many men on this subject.

The unwise use of forms is also a reason why so many doubt the efficacy of prayer. I do not disesteem forms ; but I think they are like walking-chairs that are used for teaching children how to walk, but which are dispensed with as soon as they have served that purpose. I do not say that there are not emergencies when persons might much better pray in the language of another than in their own language ; but certainly precomposed forms of prayer are not the best. They may be relatively good, they may be better than nothing under given circumstances ; but they are not to be preferred.

I see a man take out from his pocket a spelling-book in his intervals of leisure, and spell "a-b, ab ; b-a, ba ; h-a-y, hay," and so on ; and I say, "A person ought not to be carrying around a spelling-book all his life ;" and he says, "Why, how could a person learn to spell without a spelling-book ? If it were not for this old book I could not get along." Now, a spelling-book is useful for children to learn to spell from ; but when they have learned to spell, it is to be left behind. And in respect to precomposed forms of prayer, in the beginning they may help, but as soon as a person limits his spiritual flight by the range of fixed words, or thoughts or feelings, that moment he has of necessity dwarfed himself. There may be reasons of order and decorum why it is proper that public prayers should be read ; I do not deny that there are strong reasons on that side ; but if that is so, then all the more the heart ought to develop itself in private, not by employing precomposed forms of prayer, but by exercising the largest liberty in praying. When persons go privately into the presence of God, there should be the utmost freedom in the outflow of their emotions. It may be indecorous for a man to parade his weakness in oral prayer before a great congregation who would be led into a misapprehension by that weakness ; but a man who is weak in prayer, going alone into the presence of God, should go, not walking as if he were the prophet Isaiah, or the seer John, or the apostle Paul, but just as he is, in his ignorance, in his inferiority, in his perpetual

stumblings. The very thought of prayer is, that it is something by which a man may lift himself up out from under the dominion of physicalness, of materiality, and become baptized into the presence and power of a serene and spiritual God, where he shall find himself wrought upon by influences such that he shall be able to carry himself as a man, and not as an animal. The imposition of set forms of prayer upon a man girds him ; laces him ; cramps him ; confines him. No man can be free in prayer who prays habitually and always according to precomposed forms.

Let me say, further, that where the habit of prayer is such as I have described, where it is the flight of everything in us into the presence of God ; where it is abiding there ; where it is sunning one's self in the light of God's countenance ; where it is walking in sweet familiarity hand in hand with the Savior ; where it is enduring "as seeing him who is invisible"—where this is the habit of prayer, it should be encouraged. It is that which we should seek. And this being true, it becomes necessary that we should everywhere carry it out into our pleasures and our business avocations. And either our living will correspond with our praying, or our praying will be such as we dare not take into the presence of our God. Prayer works not on narrow lines. It consists not simply of asking for something. It works through a celestial magnetizing of the whole soul. It lifts a man above the infirmities of the flesh. It brings him into the region of supernal power. It gives him the inspiration of God himself.

Sometimes prayer may be answered by the granting of the specific thing asked for—if it is best. Sometimes it may be answered by the taking away of the desire. Sometimes it may be answered by that bright shining of hope and love which comes down on the soul. God answers prayer just as in nature he answers the wishes of the husbandman. He makes the clouds to rain, and the sun to shine ; and forth from the earth come ten thousand voices of birds and insects, singing and chirping, making the air vocal, and filling our hearts full of song. And all things grow and flourish under the influence of the great vivifying Force of nature.

So, when we walk with God, and live with him, our

prayers are answered, whatever we may ask for, because to love, all things are lawful. We pray for whatever we want, because we love God, because we are near to him, because we adore him, and because we are enraptured with the thought of his glory ; and he sends answers to our prayers through ourselves, and outside of ourselves, in ten thousand ways. It is not of half so much importance that we should know how the thing comes, as that we should know that the thing does come—peace : rest ; purity : hope ; aspiration ; courage in darkness : insight into the life to come : the prolongation of our manhood into the eternal sphere ; that we may feel the crown before ever it is put upon our head ; that we may hear songs before ever they are uttered by us, sung by those who await us in heaven.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

WE desire to draw near to thee together, our Father. We come together because we have experienced thy common protection, and the common bounty of thy providence, and the mercies and comforts which have been extended to us in daily life. We desire to make mention of all thy goodness; to acknowledge thee as our sovereign Heart and Lord; to rejoice in thee as our Father and our benefactor. We pray that thou wilt accept our love. We mourn that it is feeble, that it is inconstant, and that it hath in it so little of control. We pray for deeper sincerity, and more earnestness of affection. We pray that we may have that faith which works by love; by which thou shalt be brought nearer to us; by which thou shalt be coupled with all our affairs; by which we discern thee, not afar off, but near at hand, in ourselves, in all our affairs, in every surrounding circumstance. Grant, our Father, that we may have, in a richer and more perfect way, the sense that we are in very truth thy children—the children of God, of the household of faith; and this, not because of our own mind and will, but because of thy bounty and grace. For we love thee because thou first lovedst us. It was the outreaching of thine arms that kept us around about thy feet. It was thy voice that called us, and not ours that called thee. And every thought and aspiration which we have toward thee, our very importunity, is awakened in us by thee. For the Spirit maketh intercession within us and through us with groanings which cannot be uttered. The Spirit knows our want better than we, and understands the reason of our trouble better than we. And more blessed than the parent is to the child art thou to us, filling us with rest, with inspiration, with hidden strength, with hope and with courage, in all things that tend upward, and are divine.

Now we pray that thou wilt grant to every one who is seeking a clearer sky, an unobstructed horizon in the truth, that he may day by day gain a knowledge of God in the doing of his will. Grant that we may, every one of us, in the Lord Jesus Christ, find on the hither side our birthright with him, and thitherward his affiliation with God; so that in him we may approach the Father, understanding him and his disposition toward us. We pray that thou wilt help every one who labors and is heavy laden to come to thee. Help every one that hath doubts and fears, and is repelled from religion thereby. Grant that every one may find in thee the yoke and the burden which shall not tax nor task, but bring strength, and strength to be employed in usefulness. Grant, O thou great Giver, that the inward and divine power of truth may be infused into every needy and hungry heart. How many there are who wander to and fro, saying, Who will show us any good? How many there are who cannot find truth in things external! O thou who in every age hast inspired thy servants that have led men, canst not thou breathe the Holy Ghost upon hearts that are needy; that hunger and thirst; that are consciously falling into the darkness of death? Thou that art the source of light and love and joy, lift upon every one who desires to know the truth, and to walk therein, the light of thy countenance. May every one hear inwardly

the unvocalized call of God, saying, This is the way: walk ye in it; and may those who walk in it behold that it is Jesus. We pray, O Lord our God, that thou wilt become more and more dear, through thy Son, to every one who has tasted thy graciousness, and the sweetness of thy love in the soul.

We pray for those who need humility; for those who need help to overcome pride; for those who need disinterestedness, and are in strife and struggle day by day against their easily besetting selfishness. We pray for those who are abusing their power, and treading upon their fellow men whose burden they should bear, and whom they should carry in the arms of kindness. Take thou away from them hardness of heart, and teach them the royal lesson of suffering, rather than to make others suffer. More and more teach those who are in communion with thee to rise above care, above trouble, above the corroding anxieties of life, above the battle in which they are called to stand. May they be able to put on the whole armor of God; may they be able to equip themselves with weapons of offense and of defense; may they be able to stand, and having done all to stand. We pray that thou wilt thus give us a sense of thine overruling sovereignty, of the certainty and righteousness of thy providence, and of the nearness of the life that is above this life. Give us such a sense of our nearness to those that are in the spirit land, and to thee, the Head of all, that we may walk without disturbance; that we may walk in the midst of care and trouble with a perpetual song, and triumph before we triumph, and overcome before we overcome, conquering and to conquer, by faith in Him who loved us, and loves us still. Let love work mightily in us, that we may achieve the victory at last.

We pray that thy blessing may rest upon all the households that are represented here, and especially upon the little children. Teach the parents how to rear those whom thou hast given them, as voices of God speaking to them of the better land. And as they are taught by their parents to call the name of God, so may they teach those parents their relations to thee in patience, in self-sacrifice, in disinterestedness, and in faith: and we pray that thou wilt grant that those who are carrying up the young to man's estate may be saved from the temptations which beat vehemently upon them. May they be able to gird themselves in the armor of God, and be proof against seductions. We pray that they may become manful, truthful, full of honor, full of sensibility, and courageous for that which is true, fearing only that which is evil. Grant to all who are in the midst of life, bearing the tests and conflicts which must needs come in this world, grace according to their time, that every day they may be equal to the emergencies thereof.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt remember any who are sick. Be with them very graciously, as an angel in their presence. And grant them strength, O Lord, that such as are appointed unto death may behold no gloomy exit, but rather the rising joy of immortality.

Be with all who are mourning for their departed ones. Be with all who are bruised of heart, and to whom come many vague memories of days gone by, that come not again. Lift them above time

and sense into the great realm which is above time and sense. Grant that they may walk with God to-day, and be comforted.

We pray that thy blessing may be upon those who are absent from us,—our dearly beloved,—upon the sea, in distant lands, or in our own land. Wherever they are, may the blessing of the Sabbath and the Lord of the Sabbath be theirs.

Remember, O Lord, thine own churches in this city, and all in them who are laboring according to their light and their strength for the cause of God, and the welfare of men. Take away every root of bitterness, all alienations, all those secret and divisory influences which so often, through the conscience, lead to separation and harm. Bring together, in the simplicity of truth and love, all those, of every name, who work in thy cause, so that they may glorify Jesus Christ; so that the whole brotherhood of men may walk together in undivided ranks. We thank thee for the influences that are tending toward greater unity. We pray that all causes of estrangement may be taken out of the way, and that thy cause may prosper through the diligence and fidelity of thy people.

Remember all parts of our land. Be pleased to bless the President of these United States, and all who are joined with him in authority. Remember our courts, and the magistrates therein. Remember the citizens of this country. We pray that our laws may be just, and that the execution of them may be impartial. May knowledge be spread abroad amidst all our people—especially among those who are perishing for lack of vision.

Deal gently, our Father, we beseech thee, with any parts of our land where thy hand afflicts with sorrow and grievous sickness. Be pleased to sustain the sufferers, and to raise up about them such sympathy as shall bring them all needed succor in the day of their fierce adversity. May we not take pride in our immunity, but look with tenderness and compassion upon those who suffer, as suffering with them.

We pray that thy kingdom may come everywhere throughout the world; may those hateful dissensions, may that arrogance, may that domineering pride, may that cruelty and grasping selfishness which have so long been legalized among nations in their intercourse with each other, pass away; and may the truth of the Gospel, the love of Christ, the power of God among men, be seen in all the peoples of the earth. And may the glory of the Lord at last fill the whole world as the waters fill the sea.

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son and Spirit.
Amen.

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